

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 HA-05 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 COME-00 EB-08 LAB-04 SIL-01 TRSE-00 /081 W
-----040584 190737Z /14

R 171806Z MAR 78

FM AMEMBASSY LIMA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9185

C O N F I D E N T I A L LIMA 2345

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SHUM, PE

SUBJECT: HUNGER STRIKERS

REF: LIMA 1610

SUMMARY: AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL LAND HUNGER STRIKE REPS HAVE REQUESTED EMBASSY INTERVENTION WITH GOP ON BEHALF OF HUNGER STRIKERS. THEY INFORMED EMBOFF THAT GOP IS NOW WILLING TO "RECONSIDER" REINSTATEMENT OF FIRED WORKERS ONCE HUNGER STRIKE ENDS. EMBASSY HAS COMMUNICATED ITS "HUMANITARIAN INTEREST" IN PLIGHT OF HUNGER STRIKERS TO VICE MINISTER OF INTERIOR. END SUMMARY.

1. ACTING PERU REP AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL JUAN REJAS AND TWO REPS OF SOLIDARITY GROUP FORMED IN DEFENSE OF THE APPROXIMATELY 100 HUNGER STRIKERS (REFTEL) CALLED ON EMBASSY HUMAN RIGHTS COORDINATOR AT THEIR REQUEST MARCH 15 TO DISCUSS SITUATION OF STRIKERS

AND REQUEST US EMBASSY ASSISTANCE IN BREAKING IMPASSE BETWEEN STRIKERS AND GOP. THEY INFORMED EMBOFF THAT DIRECT NEGOTIATIONS WITH ACTING VICE MINISTER OF INTERIOR HAVE RESULTED IN SOMEWHAT MORE FLEXIBLE GOP ATTITUDE. THE GOP IS REPORTEDLY NOW WILLING TO CREATE AN AD HOC COMMITTEE WITHIN THE MINISTRY OF LABOR TO STUDY WITH 7 DAYS THE POSSIBLE REINSTATEMENT
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OF THE HUNGER STRIKERS. THE GOP HAS ALSO OFFERED TO CUT OFF JUDICIAL PROCEEDINGS AGAINST THE STRIKERS. THE GOVERNMENT OFFER IS CONTINGENT ON LIFTING OF THE STRIKE, WHILE THE STRIKERS ARE DEMANDING IMMEDIATE REINSTATEMENT AS A PRECONDITION TO ENDING THEIR PROTEST.

2. THE SOLIDARITY GROUP REPRESENTATIVES QUESTIONED SINCERITY

OF GOP OFFER, IN VIEW OF MINISTRY OF LABOR'S POOR RECORD IN DEFENSE OF WORKER' RIGHTS. THEY ASKED EMBASSY TO INTERVENE WITH PRESIDENT OR PRIME MINISTER ON STRIKERS' BEHALF. EMBOFF EXPLAINED THAT IN SPITE OF OUR INTEREST IN THE PHYSICAL WELFARE OF THE HUNGER STRIKERS, WHATEVER STEPS WE MIGHT TAKE MUST GIVE THE APPEARANCE OF INTERVENING IN PERU'S INTERNAL MATTERS. EMBOFF DID, HOWEVER, INDICATE THAT WE WOULD COMMUNICATE THEIR CONCERN TO THE GOP.

3. POL CONSELOR, IN PHONE CONVERSATION WITH VICE MINISTER OF INTERIOR, INFORMED HIM OF SOLIDARITY GROUP'S VISIT TO EMBASSY AND THEIR CONCERN OVER WHAT THEY PERCEIVE TO BE A LACK OF GUARANTEES FROM THE GOP IF THEY LIFT THE STRIKE. SUBSEQUENTLY, AT SOCIAL EVENT POL COUNSELOR REITERATED TO VICE MINISTER EMBASSY HUMANITARIAN INTEREST IN THE STRIKERS' SITUATION, CITING DECLARATIONS OF THE MINISTER OF INTERIOR IN A MARCH 15 PRESS CONFERENCE TO THE EFFECT THAT HE SYMPATHIZED WITH THE PLIGHT OF THE HUNGER STRIKERS, WHOSE LIVES WERE ENDANGERED WHILE THE "GREAT INSTIGATORS" OF THE STRIKE ARE SCOT-FREE. VICE MINISTER APPEARED SENSITIVE TO EMBASSY CONCERN FOR STRIKERS. EMBASSY HUMAN RIGHTS COORDINATOR INFORMED SOLIDARITY GROUP REPRESENTATIVE THAT EMBASSY HAD RELAYED THEIR GENERAL CONCERN TO THE GOP.

4. COMMENT: WE CONTINUE TO HAVE SOME DOUBTS ABOUT THE ALLEGED GRAVITY OF THE HUNGER STRIKERS' CONDITION AND ABOUT
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THE "DRY STRIKE" THAT THEY ARE NOW THREATENING. ON THE OTHER HAND, WE UNDERSTAND THEIR CONCERN ABOUT THE GOOD FAITH OF THE PROPOSED AD HOC COMMITTEE FROM THE MINISTRY OF LABOR. WE UNDERSTAND THAT SOLIDARITY GROUP MADE SIMILAR VISIT TO UK AND PERHAPS OTHER EMBASSIES. UK POL COUNSELOR PLANS TO CALL ON VICE MINISTER OF INTERIOR TODAY. EX-AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL REP LAURA CALLER TOLD EMBOFF MARCH 15 THAT SHE HAD WRITTEN A LETTER TO THE PAPAL NUNCIO REQUESTING HIS HELP IN RESOLVING THE HUNGER STRIKE. THE GOP-CONTROLLED MEDIA CONTINUES TO LARGELY IGNORE THE STRIKE (NOW IN ITS 48TH DAY) AND COVERAGE IN MOST INDEPENDENT MAGAZINES HAS DROPPED OFF. THE FACT THAT THE STRIKERS ARE IN GOP CUSTODY AND ARE SUBJECT TO ROUTINE MEDICAL CONTROL REDUCES THE LIKELIHOOD OF A DEATH, BUT WE DO NOT ENTIRELY DISCOUNT THAT POSSIBILITY SHOULD THE IMPASSE DRAG ON.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PUBLIC DEMONSTRATIONS, HUMAN RIGHTS, EMBASSIES, DIPLOMATIC REPRESENTATIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 17 mar 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978LIMA02345
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780121-0784
Format: TEL
From: LIMA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780355/aaaabupn.tel
Line Count: 110
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 389517c5-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 LIMA 1610
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 20 jul 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3293585
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: HUNGER STRIKERS
TAGS: SHUM, PE, US
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odhc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/389517c5-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014